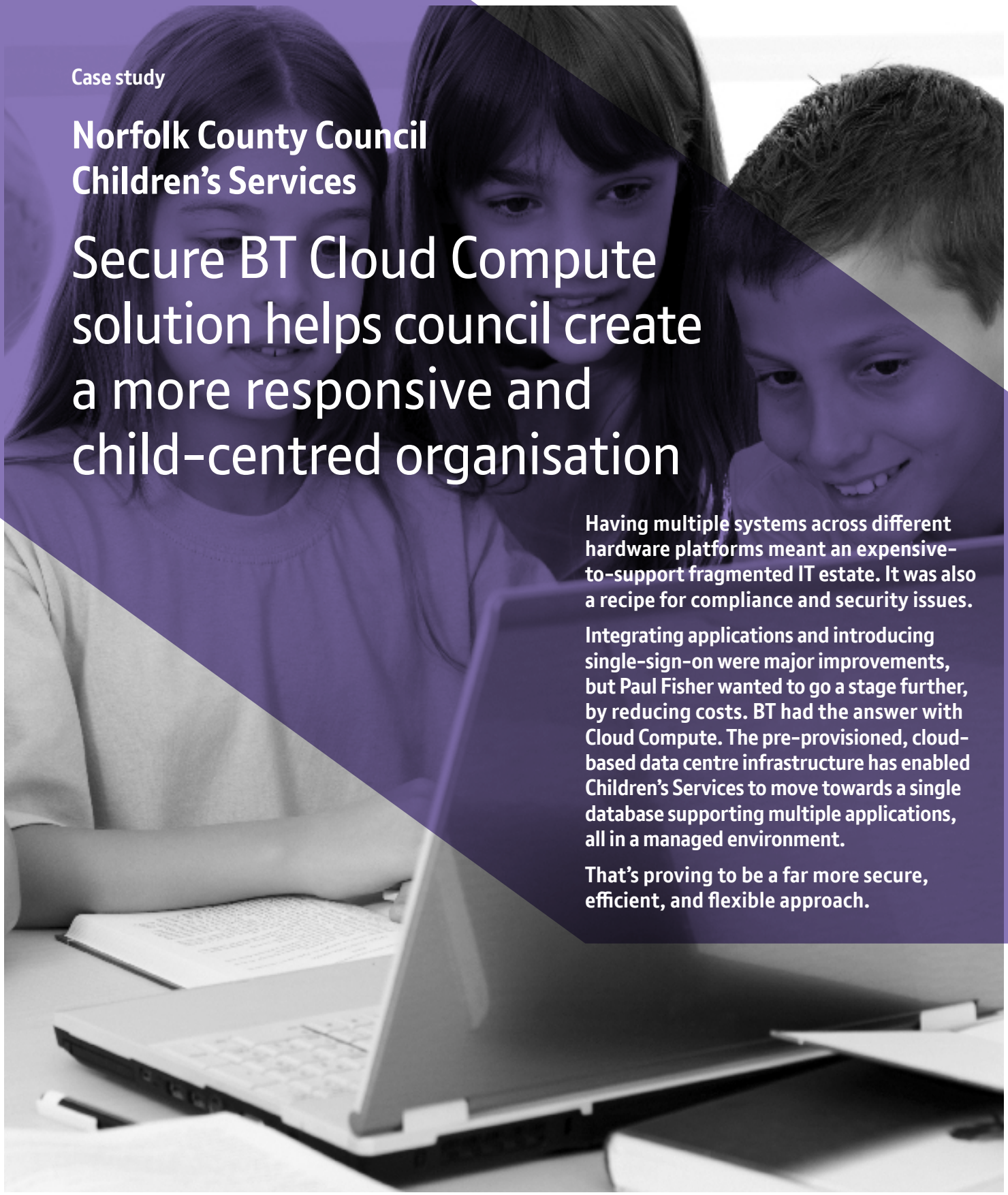
Case study

Norfolk County Council Children's Services

Secure BT Cloud Compute solution helps council create a more responsive and child-centred organisation



Having multiple systems across different hardware platforms meant an expensive-to-support fragmented IT estate. It was also a recipe for compliance and security issues.

Integrating applications and introducing single-sign-on were major improvements, but Paul Fisher wanted to go a stage further, by reducing costs. BT had the answer with Cloud Compute. The pre-provisioned, cloud-based data centre infrastructure has enabled Children's Services to move towards a single database supporting multiple applications, all in a managed environment.

That's proving to be a far more secure, efficient, and flexible approach.

"Across the estate of 450 schools, only having to input data once rather than up to five times, we've calculated the savings could be as much as £2 million to £4 million."

Paul Fisher, Assistant Director, Children's Services (Business and Compliance), Norfolk County Council

BT

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Norfolk County Council Children's Services department adopts BT cloud-based services for application integration

Challenge

Supporting nearly 110,000 children and young people at all stages of their development, Norfolk County Council Children's Services works with 450 schools across Norfolk. However, multiple systems meant an expensive-to-support architecture. The same data existed in different places, making it impossible to maintain a single version of the truth. Local expertise was a constant problem: school staff had better things to do. Worse, there was a compliance issue: children's attendance could not be tracked as they moved around.

Another penalty was that children and staff had to log on anew to every application. Not only was this time wasting, but also the resulting multiple identities created further compliance and security issues. Paul Fisher, Assistant Director of Children's Services (Business and Compliance) for Norfolk County Council, says: "We wanted an infrastructure that would integrate our applications with single sign-on capability."

Solution

The first stage of the solution was to adopt a systems interoperability framework (SIF). This added a translation layer between the different systems, enabling them to talk to each other. With improved data sharing capabilities, Children's Services can comply with school attendance regulations. Interconnectivity between software applications enabled single sign-on (SSO). Giving individuals a common identity across different systems, SSO means that once signed on to one application the user can seamlessly move to others without needing to rekey user names and passwords.

Although a big step in the right direction, the SIF/SSO architecture was still high cost in terms of multiple processing, storage, and security environments. Furthermore, new education systems would each still come with their own hardware platforms, incurring still higher capital costs and still higher ongoing support costs.

For Children's Services, the answer was to consolidate all systems onto a single IT platform. BT Cloud Compute was chosen to host the SIF/SSO infrastructure. Inherently resilient, with 99.9 per cent availability, should a problem occur Cloud Compute is self-healing. As a cloud-based environment, it enables customers to create, monitor, and manage their own virtual data centres. Automated service delivery processes with a self-service portal ensure maximum efficiency.

By eliminating the need for much of the physical hardware in schools and physical data centres, Cloud Compute would help Norfolk County Council manage its ICT infrastructure at much less cost by moving applications, storage, and security into the cloud. This would not only lower accommodation requirements, but also cut power requirements and reduce carbon emissions. BT estimates Cloud Compute offers total cost of ownership savings of up to 40 per cent compared to traditional approaches.

A further advantage of Cloud Compute was speed of deployment. Mike Pickett, Manager of Digital Infrastructure, ICT Solutions, at Norfolk County Council says: "If we need new capacity, it can actually be delivered within a few hours."

Value

The implementation and decommissioning of educational applications can now be achieved via the self-service portal with just a few clicks. Besides releasing expensive accommodation, there are other benefits in terms of a more child-centred organisation.

Overall productivity in Children's Services is expected to improve, as centralisation and simplification feed through. "The interoperability infrastructure is absolutely critical in terms of delivering efficiency savings across the estate," says Mike Pickett.

Most importantly for Paul Fisher, however: "With BT Cloud Compute we saw no start-up costs, and as far as we were concerned that gave us the better financial return." And all of this is achieved without compromising data security. The council has a very clear security policy to which BT and Children's Services business processes and personnel all conform. Mike Pickett says: "We know at a technical level that the cloud-based data centre itself is incredibly secure."

The BT Cloud Compute solution is enabling Children's Services to progressively move towards a single database supporting multiple applications. Paul Fisher concludes: "Not only do we see reductions in our carbon output, but also schools are using less space."

Core services

- BT Cloud Compute – pre-provisioned, cloud-based data centre infrastructure

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